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History of the Movements for the Division of Los Angeles County.

BY PROFESSOR J. M. GUINN.

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HISTORIANS, generally speaking, are not partial to failures. The movement be what it may that fails, fills but a small space in history, and the actors in it are usually relegated to oblivion, or if commemorated, it is by the briefest of notices.

The movement to divide the county of Los Angeles and create a new county out of the southeastern portion, forms no exception to this rule. It is one of the unwritten chapters of our local history. It began twenty years ago and almost succeeded, yet there exists no written record of it except, perhaps, a few brief paragraphs in the legislative proceedings—session of 1869-70.

The most active movers in the scheme are dead and almost forgotten. Success might have given them fame, at least it would have given their names a place in the annals of our county. The success of their scheme would have wrought a great change in the history of our county for the two decades past, but whether for better or worse your historian will not attempt to decide.

To the late Major Max Strobel of Anaheim, belongs the credit (or odium) of inaugurating the movement. Whether his fertile brain originated it, I know not. He was its most earnest advocate and a most active worker for its success.

Twenty years ago there were numerous reasons for a division that do not exist to-day. A trip to the county seat and return required two days, and from the more distant parts of the area included in the proposed county, four days travel over hot and dusty roads in the summer time—through mud and mire in the winter time. Bridges there were none, and often during the rainy season, the rivers swollen to raging torrents, cut off all communication with the metropolis for weeks at a time. A lumbering old stage coach three times a week carried the mail, and at the compensation of ten cents a mile banged and battered the unfortunate passenger onward to his destination at the reckless speed of five miles an hour. Six dollars in coin of the realm was the fare from Anaheim to Los Angeles and return. One dollar and five cents is all that a soulless corporation exacts from you now. There were other and more grievous causes of complaint. The denizens of Los Angeles city monopolized all the county offices. The dwellers in the bucolic districts were taxed without representation, and this

was too greivous to be borne without protest; for, had not our revolutionary fathers fought, bled and died for office?

These and other grievances were set forth as causes for division, and petitions were circulated and numerously signed by the denizens dwelling within the limits of the proposed new county.

A bill creating the county of Anaheim and making the town of Anaheim its county seat was drawn up. The dividing line between the old and the new county began at a point in the Pacific ocean three nautical miles southwestward from the mouth of the old San Gabriel river, thence running northeasterly, following the channel of that river to an intersection with the San Bernardino base line, thence east on that line to the division line between the counties of San Bernardino and Los Angeles. The new county included within its limits the Los Nietos, San José and Santa Ana valleys, the richest and at that time the most populous valleys of Los Angeles county. Strobel had enlisted in his scheme the active co-operation of some of the wealthiest pioneers of the county, William Workman of Puente, Temple, Rubottom, Fryer, Don Juan Foster, Ben Dryfus and others favored his scheme. Armed with numerous petitions and abundantly supplied with coin, Strobel appeared in Sacramento at the opening of the legislature. Early in the session his bill passed the Assembly with but little opposition. The hopes of the divisionists beat high. Anaheim became a political Mecca for office-seeking pilgrims. Statesmen of Los Nietos and place hunters from San Juan counselled with the patriots of Anaheim and parcelled out the prospective offices among them.

Then came a long delay. Strobel was hopeful, but opposition had shown itself. Gold would win, and gold he must have or all would be lost. The envious and uncharitable said that Strobel had been fighting the tiger in the jungles of Sacramento, and that the tiger had had the best of it. But the faithful gathered together their hard-earned shekels and the proceeds of many a gallon of wine, the price of many a broncho and many a bullock, were sent to Strobel that he might convince the honest legislators of the richness and resources of the new county. Another long delay—the waiting statesmen on the banks of the Santa Ana grew wild-eyed and haggard—hope deferred was wearing them to a shadow. One day in the ides of March the lumbering old stage coach, with its tri-weekly mail, rolled into the embryo capital of the new county. The statesmen gathered around eager for the latest from Sacramento. It came in a letter from Strobel. The bill had been defeated in the Senate, but he was working for a reconsideration and would be sure of success if more money could be sent him. By the defeat of that bill the county lost a large crop of statesmen—nipped in the bud. To Strobel's last appeal even the most faithful were dumb. A few weeks later the old coach brought Strobel himself. He told the story of his defeat in pathetic tones. Railroad machinations and a corruption fund freely used by that soulless corporation had defeated his measure. A rumor, true or false I know not, attributed his failure to a different cause. Strobel,

finding opposition to his measure increasing, and his coin decreasing, had determined upon a grand "coup d'etat." The legislature of '69 was one of those known in the history of the state as the "legislature of a thousand drinks."

Strobel's scheme was to give a champagne supper the night before a vote was to be taken on his bill, to which the members of the Senate, and particularly those known to be opposed to his bill, were to be invited. At that feast of reason and flow of soul he would give special attention to the opponents and drink them under the table. Then on the morrow, whilst they calmly slept beneath the banquet table, he would rally his friends and the bill would be passed.

Strobel prided himself on his bacchanalian achievements, and doubtless he could have drunk Bacchus himself under the table, and have staggered Thor or a Jotund of the Norseland in a drinking bout, but he had never before matched himself against an old time bourbon California Legislature.

When the morning sun looked in on that banquet hall, Strobel quietly slept beneath the table, but the legislators had gone to their favorite saloons to seek their matutinal glass of whisky straight. When the all-important moment arrived the general was not there to rally his forces. The bill was defeated by a small majority.

Major Max Strobel, who figured quite prominently in what might be called the mediæval history of our county, deserves more than a passing notice. A soldier of fortune and a Machiavel in politics, he was always on the losing side. A man of versatile genius and varied resources, a lawyer, an editor, an engineer, an accomplished linguist and a man of education, his exchequer was always in a state of collapse and the brightest efforts of his genius were wasted in staving off his creditors. He was a German by birth and reputed to be of aristocratic lineage. He was a compatriot of Carl Schurtz and Sigel in the German revolution of '48, and on the failure of that movement, with Sigel his intimate friend, fled to this country. He drifted down to Nicaragua and filibustered with Walker. He finally located in Anaheim where he bought a vineyard and engaged in wine making.

But the life of a vineyardist was too narrow and contracted for his genius, and he was constantly branching out into new projects. He was one of the pioneer prospectors for oil in this county. He sunk a great hole in Brea cañon where, if he did not strike oil, he did strike the bottom of the purses of those whom he enlisted in his scheme.

After his failure to divide the county he started a newspaper in Anaheim. It was to be the organ of county division. It succeeded in dividing the divisionists into two factions—the Strobel and the anti-Strobel—who waged war against each other through the columns of their respective organs, the Advocate and the Gazette. Strobel's organ, the People's Advocate, starved to death for want of patronage and was buried in the grave of journalistic failures. How transitory is fame! The mighty questions that perturbed the quiet of Anaheim in those days are forgotten. I doubt whether

there is a citizen of that town to-day who could give you the name of Strobel's organ, and it is doubtful whether there is a copy of it in existence.

Strobel's next venture and his last, was the sale of Santa Catalina Island to European capitalists. Supplied with funds by the owners, and a number of rich mineral specimens from some source, he sailed for England and located in London. He succeeded in convincing a syndicate of English capitalists of the inexhaustible mineral wealth of the island, and negotiated a sale for a million dollars. A contract was drawn up and an hour set for the next day, when the parties were to sign and the money to be paid.

When the hour arrived for closing the transaction, Strobel did not appear. Search was made for him. He was found in his room dead—dead on the very eve of success, for the sale of the island would have made him wealthy. "Unmerciful disaster followed him fast and followed him faster," to the verge of the grave. Negotiations for the island were broken off by the death of Strobel. Nearly twenty years after, the island was sold for less than one quarter of what he was to receive for it.

After the death of Strobel the management of the county division scheme fell into the hands of a committee. The name was changed from the county of Anaheim to the county of Orange, and the eastern boundary contracted so as to leave out the San José valley—the people of that valley electing to remain in the old county. A bill creating the county of Orange was introduced in the legislature of 1871-72, but never reached a vote. In 1873 the division question drifted into politics. A county division convention was held in Anaheim, and a man by the name of Bush, from Santa Ana, was nominated for the legislature.

The policy of the divisionists was to force one or the other of the political parties to place Bush on their ticket to secure the division vote. In their conventions, neither the Democratic nor the Republican parties took any notice of Bush's candidacy. Ignored by both parties, he took the stump and made a county division campaign on the one issue that he was the only honest man before the people. He received a few votes, and then this Diogenes wonder—an honest man—passed out of the political arena forever.

In the next legislature, Wiseman, nicknamed the "Broad axe," from the vigorous manner in which he hewed to pieces the Queen's English, appeared as the champion of county division. Neither his pathetic appeals for the oppressed people of Orange nor his superlative denunciations of their oppressors, convinced the lawmakers at Sacramento that the people were suffering for the want of a new county.

Another change in boundaries and name. A bill to create the county of Santa Ana, and to make Anaheim the county seat, was drafted. The name was a concession to Santa Ana, a concession, however, that failed to conciliate. Santa Ana, Orange and Tustin opposed the scheme, and the missionaries sent from Anaheim to convert them met a cold reception, and

their arguments for county division were turned to ridicule. Santa Ana wanted the county seat and would not be comforted without it. Jealousies and bickerings, local prejudices and local ambitions defeated the measure. The question of division for a time fell into innocuous desuetude, Anaheim making her last effort in 1880. Santa Ana now appears as the champion of the scheme she formerly opposed. The boundaries of the new county have been so contracted as to leave her hated rival, Anaheim, only three miles from its northern boundary. Anaheim now as vigorously opposes as she once advocated the measure.

